

THORNEY RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.

Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the year 1925.

MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN,

The Ministry of Health require a "Survey" Report to be made for 1925, reviewing the progress of Public Health work during the previous five years in addition to last year.

As your Rural District is a small one many of the arrangements expected to be made, say, in a large Borough, will naturally not find a place in your area ; consequently this Report will be on much the same lines as earlier ones though following the scheme suggested by the Ministry.

Natural and Social Conditions of the Area.

AREA.—18959 acres.

POPULATION.—Census, 1921 2440. Estimated 1925 (R.G.) 2531.

Physical Features and General Character of the District.

The District is situated in the Fen, and is very low-lying and flat ; the village of Thorney is built on part of what was originally the only portion of your district usually dry, being on a small island about 150 acres in extent, which has a gravelly soil ; whereas the rest of the area is from 10 to 20 feet lower, and the soil is a black vegetable loam with a clay subsoil. The present village is situated towards the northern portion of the original island, which extends as far as the Hill Farm and Tonham Farm Houses ; recent building has taken place on the south side of the Thorney—Wisbech road on land which shelves down to the fen proper. Nearly three-fourths of the total houses are not situated in the village, but are grouped on and around the various farms and occupied by workers on those farms.

The area is the north-western boundary of the Isle of Ely, and is within the Wisbech Division of the Isle for Parliamentary purposes, being part of the area under the Isle of Ely County Council ; is part of the Whittlesea Petty Sessional district (all in Cambridgeshire) and is attached to the Peterborough Union (Soke of Peterborough Division of Northamptonshire).

Your area is bounded by Wisbech Rural District (Isle of Ely C.C.), Whittlesea Rural District (Isle of Ely) Peterborough Rural District (Soke of Peterborough C.C.) and Crowland Rural District (parts of Holland, Lincolnshire C.C.)

The whole of your area (except for 1117 acres comprising Stanground North) formerly belonged to the Duke of Bedford, whose ancestors were mainly instrumental in carrying out the drainage of the fen, as a result of which the district generally is ranked as being part of the most fertile land in England ; some of it is very low-lying, but owing to the well-planned and carefully maintained system of drainage, floods are often prevented when higher land in neighbouring counties is partly inundated.

The District is both watered and drained artificially, *i.e.*, water for the supply of the district is taken from the River Nene at the Dog-in-a-doublet sluice, whence it runs in a canal to the village ; at various points smaller drains lead off to supply farms and buildings ; after passing to the north of the village the canal ends in narrower channels which similarly divide into others so that practically all parts of the district are supplied with water. After affording this supply the drains converge into larger ones which carry off the surplus water, and ultimately empty into the River Nene again below Wisbech. Strangers frequently fail to appreciate the dual purpose of most of the drains and dykes, and expect to see a system of irrigation employed as in Egypt. The great trouble usually experienced in the district is to get rid of water, not to procure it.

Agriculture is the only industry, the majority of the inhabitants being farm labourers, the remainder being farmers, smallholders and the customary tradesmen. Corn and roots, chiefly potatoes are the principal crops ; many acres previously in grass have been ploughed during the last 16 years, and sheep grazing has practically disappeared, and the number of shire horses bred has considerably decreased.

Number of Inhabited Houses (1921)—450.

Number of Families or Separate Occupiers (1921)—463.

Rateable Value—£45,326. Assessable Value—£17,426.

Sum Represented by a 1d. Rate—£72 10s. 0d.

Vital Statistics.

			Total.	Males.	Females.
BIRTHS :	{	Legitimate	50	27	23
		Illegitimate	3	1	2
			<hr/> 53	<hr/> 28	<hr/> 25
Birth Rate	...		20.94.		
			Total.	Males.	Females.
DEATHS :	25	13	12
Death Rate	...		9.87.		
Deaths of Infants under One year of Age				Legitimate.	Illegitimate.
				4	1
Rate per 1,000 Births			94.3.		

The following Table shows the Figures relating to Vital Statistics for the past Five Years :

		1921	1922	1923	1924	1925
Population	...	2240	2270	2333	2494	2531
Births	53	55	54	45	53
Birth Rate	...	23.65	24.34	23.1	18.08	20.94
Deaths	17	19	21	18	25
Death Rate	...	7.54	8.37	9.001	7.21	9.87
Deaths of Infants	{	4	3	4	1	5
under 1 year of age						
Rate per 1000 Births	..	75.47	54.5	74.07	22.2	94.3

The Amount of Poor Law Relief.

The Relieving Officer informs me that on an average 36 persons in the district receive an amount of £7 5s. 6d. per week. There is little unemployment, in fact during most of the year gangs of men and of women come into the district daily for such work as potato setting, lifting, riddling, thrashing, etc., as insufficient housing exists to accommodate all the labour required under present conditions of farming.

Measles, Mumps and Influenza were prevalent during the year, but no deaths were registered as being due to any of these diseases.

General Provision of Health Services in the Area.

Hospitals Provided or Subsidised by the Local Authority.

Tuberculosis	}	None.
Maternity		
Children		
Fever		
Small Pox		
Other		

The Hospitals in the area are :—The Peterborough Infirmary and Dispensary is the General Hospital for the district, it contains 75 beds, to which 852 patients were admitted during 1925, in addition to 2575 out-patients and casualties treated : making a total of 3497 patients dealt with during the year. There were 640 surgical cases and 530 major operations were performed. The medical cases numbered 212. A new hospital is in course of erection, in which provision is being made for 100 beds.

There is a small hospital at Wisbech, to which some patients from the district go for treatment.

Institutional treatment for unmarried mothers, homeless infants, and illegitimate children is provided when required at the Poor Law Institution, Thorpe Road, Peterborough, your district being within the Peterborough Union.

Your Council has no ambulance either for infectious or accident cases.

There are no clinics or treatment centres in your area, but the Isle of Ely C.C. provides Consultative and Treatment Centres at March and at Wisbech for Tuberculosis and Venereal Diseases.

The Health Officers of the Council are a part-time M.O.H. and a part-time Sanitary Inspector ; there are no assistants to either officer, and no special nurses or health visitors.

There are no nurses employed by your Council, either for general nursing or for infectious diseases, and no midwives are employed by or subsidised by the Council.

There are no definite arrangements in the area for systematic chemical work.

There are no Local Acts or Special Local Orders in force.

Sanitary Circumstances of the Area.

The source of water supply has been dealt with earlier ; those houses situated outside the village are dependant upon rain water collected into tanks from the roofs of their houses, or upon water taken from the nearest drain for their supply : usually this

is boiled or filtered, but no other source is available in a fen district with a clay subsoil. Borings have been made in the past, but though water has been found it is brackish and unfit for drinking purposes. An experimental plant has been on trial for filtering the water for supplying the village, and analysis shows that this plant delivers a water far more pure than that afforded by the existing plant ; the area of the filter beds is too small and the rate of filtration too rapid, and the direction of flow upward instead of downward in the old beds. The necessary alterations to improve the supply should be taken in hand as early as possible, failing arrangements being made to obtain water from some outside source.

In the village some of the houses are fitted with water closets emptying into sewers the contents of which after flowing to the collecting tanks are pumped on to a small sewage farm. The remainder of the houses are supplied with earth closets, some of which are emptied by the Council, and others empty their pails on their gardens. Outside the village the individual householders are responsible for dealing with their own sewage.

The Council supply a cart for scavenging in the village.

Infectious Disease.

One case of Pulmonary Tuberculosis was notified during the year.

Housing.

During the year 35 inspections have been made, and in every case where the Sanitary Inspector has drawn attention to defects they have been remedied without formal notice.

A demolition order made in respect of three cottages two years ago has remained inoperative owing to the continued occupation of these premises by a family against whom an ejectment order was made in connection with another house, this family being "temporarily" housed in the condemned cottages.

The houses in the area are unusually good, particularly so for a purely rural district ; the majority were built at different times by the former owners of the estate, the Dukes of Bedford ; and later buildings have been carried out as much as possible in keeping with the older standard.

There are no bye-laws relating to houses, or to houses let in lodgings, or to tents, vans, sheds, etc.

In general, your district has enjoyed a healthy time during the past year, in that there has been no outbreak of infectious or other serious disease ; the inhabitants are well housed and not overcrowded, and unemployment of residents practically unknown.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

HAROLD CLAPHAM,

M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.